CovidArchemyth and Pakistani Social Media Discourse

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ABSTRACT

The 21st-century world has seen several natural calamities in the form of widespread diseases such as SARS outbreak (2002-2004), swine flu pandemic (2009), and now the Covid-19. The outbreak of coronavirus has put the world in a state of anxiety and fear. As a result, a considerable social myths content has been disembarked as a dynamic response to the pandemic. Like elsewhere, the social media discourse on Covid-19 myths is being constructed and consumed in Pakistan. Considering Bouchard's concept of configuration of social myths as either "strictly contextualized" or having "universal features with loose ties to social mechanism," the investigation of the configuration of social myths of Covid-19 in Pakistani social media is explored. Furthermore, the myths were analyzed for co-relation and interconnectedness through intertextuality. The study propounds that the social media discourse of dominant social actors hailing from religious, social, and philosophical domains construe locally contextualized ideas of Covid-19. The social actors' coalition of all social myths set the scene for a Pakistani *CovidArchemyth,* which is intertwined with peculiarities of Pakistani tradition and culture.

Introduction

Every society makes out pulsating receptivities and extensively approved legitimacies that configure its outlook, nourish public attitudes, and guide communal courses of action. These extraordinarily influential symbolic devices; myths, are therefore collective representations of a society. As carriers of norms, principles and convictions, myths inform the production and consumption of worldviews, philosophies, identities and consistencies in societies. They letsocieties to position their ambitions, to organize their segregations, to respond ardently to

catastrophes and distresses. The 21st-century world has seen many natural calamities in the form of widespread diseases such as the SARS outbreak (2002-2004), swine flu pandemic (2009), Covid-19, and the mass response towards these fatalities. The on-going Covid-19 crisis has put the world in a state of anxiety and fear. This deadly virus has been declared a world-wide pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO). The movement of the citizens has been controlled; various public activities have been suspended, including the Olympics, various domestic and international flights, shopping malls, cinemas to slow down the spread of the virus. In this lock-down state, social media platforms are utilized to connect and communicate; individuals share their opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives through this communication source. As a result, a massive social myths content has been disembarked as a dynamic response to the pandemic.

Different social myths embed different social realities combined with fact and fiction as Gérard Bouchard (2017) sums social myth as "a sacralized composite of emotion and reason rooted in the psyche, imbued with transcendence, and manifested in the social." These social myths vary from society to society, depending upon their philosophical, religious, and political anchorage. Pakistan is one of the societies in which ethnicity, religion, politics, history, and geography, and many more diversities partake in constructing and consuming social discourses. Consequently, it is critical to explore the social media discourse configured around the Covid-19 pandemic on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Considering Bouchard's concept of configuration of social myths as either "strictly contextualized" or having "universal features with loose ties to social mechanism," the investigation of the configuration of social myths of Covid-19 in Pakistani social media is explored. The co-relation and interconnection in the configuration of COVID myths based on local or global context are gauged through probing into recurrent themes and linguistic cues for which the analytical tool of "intertextuality" seems helpful. Intertextuality is considered a specific analytical device of co-presence of two or more texts with one text with free information to the other. It also shows how texts are interlinked or disjoined in a particular activity pattern of a community. The *intertexts* of a text are all the other texts that we use to make sense of it. Some of them share the same thematic pattern of "propositional content," also called co-thematic texts (Lemke, 1995). The same "propositional content" in this study is investigated based on three kinds of linguistic intertextual connections: repetition, imitation, and allusion. Any set of text for repetitive, common thematic content in Tweets and Facebook posts is explored based on its social purpose within the Pakistani community. All local or desi examples, references, or thematic patterns are separated from global textual patterns. This paper also extends Bouchard's discussion of social myths to the configuration of "Archemyth," which is unique. It rarely occurs in any society as the coalition of different social actors while temporarily masking the significant contradictions in the society (Bouchard, 2017). The archemyth is an aggregate of all the social myths and operates at a larger scale, so that this study will look for the configuration of any possible Covid-19Archemyth in Pakistani society embedded in the language of social media posts.

Significance of the Study
This paper investigates the social media posts related to Covid-19 by employing Boucahrd's perspective with the primary purpose of dealing with social myths as they represent society based on the reflection of the thoughts and ideas of its social actors. This paper talks about the

general discourses of the masses on social media and addresses the social representation of the myths. It contextualizes prevalent opinions on public platforms, and social forums about a particular event in the present case is Covid-19. It is pertinent to note that this study does not ask whether the Covid-19 myths of religion and science are true or false, but it only points out the directions in which social myths are working in Covid-19 time. Furthermore, this study adds significant knowledge about desi/local sides of ordinary people and religious and scientific people, forming an alliance to create *CovidArchemyth* unique to Pakistani society.

This study aims at understanding social myths as infused by power, as productive and exploitive, generative, and disseminative, the study attempts to investigate linguistically how they are ordered, correlated, and transmitted in Pakistani social media discourse of Covid-19.

Method of the Study

The research has used a qualitative mode of inquiry to answer the question under study. Drawing upon Bouchard's (2017) theoretical framework to organize and co-relate social media posts based on interconnectivity features of the intertextuality. Intertextuality is "concerned with the recurrent discourse and activity patterns of the community and how they are constituted by, instanced in, and interconnected or dissevered through, particular texts" (Lemke, 1995a,p. 86). The relationship of the posts from one theme of Covid-19 with the posts from the other themes of Covid-19 were analyzed using the following steps: First, the posts were categorized according to religious, scientific, philosophical, allegorical and health themes drawn from Bouchard's (2017) typology of myths; second, each thematic post was then assigned its context, i.e., local or global. The themed posts were then analyzed for those linguistic cues and recurrent themes that make the posts interconnected. Third, the posts were investigated for their contribution to the formation of the *CovidArchemyth*.

Data Sampling

The focus of this research is on the social media discourse on Covid-19. Therefore this paper uses the "Purposive Sampling" technique to collect data from social media platforms: *Facebook* and *Twitter*. The study has been delimited to these two social media platforms based on the frequency of using these apps for commentary on every new happening in Pakistan. Facebook is adding new users in Pakistan at a rate of one every 12 seconds, and 28% of social media users use Facebook (Kemp). The study chooses only those posts from these social media platforms which have 1000 or more likes. Moreover, this research delineates only themes and relationships of texts through intertextuality. Henceforth, the study takes into account only textual posts without any visual images.

Using the Twitter Streaming API and Facebook groups and social posts, we collected data related to Covid-19 from April 31 to June 4, 2020. As this was considered the peak time of corona spread in Pakistan, it can also be easily assumed that all social actors were actively adding to the discourse.

Results and Discussion

According to Bouchard (2017), social myths emphasize all-inclusive societal dynamics, but they mainly influence social actors, motivations, deliberate actions, and the concrete, immediate issues associated with them. Therefore, it is crucial to shed light on features of the relations of the social myths at Covid-19 in Pakistani society to recognize specific ways they are presented on social media posts, i.e., Twitter and Facebook posts. The discussion is presented in three steps, i.e., thematic categorization, contextualization, and configuration of *CovidArchemyth*. It is also significant to note that this paper primarily analyses the textual content of the posts and their different modes of construction based on Bouchard's typology (2017), and several posts form a unique Pakistani context only. Thereby, this article contextualizes these as local health myths/ desi myths used for this paper only.

Thematic Categorization of the Data

Religious Myths

The importance of religion in Pakistani society can be traced back to the fact that the country gained its independence after the severe religious strife. Since then, the ideology of Pakistan is considered solely based on religion and faith. Despite the focus that Islam gives to reasoning, Pakistani people are always lured by different faith interpretations. Different interpretations are primarily based on religious life foundations, mysterious powers, supernatural forces, and their relations with humans, as Bouchard put forth (2017: 28). These versatile interpretations of faith and religion become evident at the time of crisis, and at present, Covid-19 is paving the way for the different religious cures on social media. This study has found that social media posts are brimming with the religious, linguistic cues like "namaz", "prayers", "duas", "astaghfar" and "sadqa" "return to Allah", that truly depicts the fundamental elements of a person's religious faith and belief (RP1, RP2, RP3). As these religious words show that the authors of these posts are finding the cure and the strength in Almighty based on forgiveness from the supernatural force of Allah Almighty, so these posts fall into Bouchard's typology of religious myth. People are also attaching their narratives with such posts, but most of the time, the posts have gone viral after the attestation of some renowned religious scholars like Molana Tariq Jamil. He tweeted by saying that " Corona is a trial so in order to stay protected and safe, the solution lies in increased dua, rajooh towards Allah and sadqa". As an influential social actor, his tweet attracted people on Twitter and went viral on other social media platforms and turned people towards divine help and guidance in such times of trial and tribulations. Some posts started to give solutions in the form of divine help of recitation of "Surah Rahman" based on the divine nature of faith and shows that Pakistani social media posts are inclined to draw spiritual guidance from religious scholars religious discourse (Sultana, 2019). Henceforth, the researchers arranged all such posts related to the supernatural force of Allah Almighty and religious content into the thematic category of religious myths.

Scientific Myths

Another perspective of explaining the novel coronavirus is based on scientific knowledge for which an international organization, WHO, is considered an authority that posited already that

any cure could take a year or half until its completion. Meanwhile, as the nature of the viral disease stipulates, it spread like bush fire in human society, and Pakistan is no exception. The information about these viral diseases from social media influencers may sometimes spread faster even than the factual information in Pakistan (Rafi, 2020). Doctors and scientists are that section of Pakistani society who can guide and help through disease. Consequently, social media is rampant with the scientific cures for Covid-19, and this study finds the highest textual traces related to the science, labs, medicinal names, formulas names of different medicines. These posts are considered a priori to be correct but are not proven yet, and although these posts are avoided being censured professionally, all such posts constitute the scientific discourse (Bouchard, 2017, p.29). The large sections of society, significantly the social media posts of doctors like Dr. Matiullah (Ex-Hod Medicine, RMU), Dr. Faheem Khan, and many others, are the posts containing scientific cures and medicines "Azithromycin, Erytentificcuhromycin, tab. Panadol, Procalcitonin, D dimers, LDH, Ferritin and CRP, Hydroxychloroquin 200mg, and Mucolyter sachet are labeled as scientific myths present paper (SP4, SP5, SP6, SP7).

Philosophical Myths

Another way of understanding this universe and the happenings going on is anchored in philosophical discussions. Any problem in this universe can be discussed and explained through this knowledge system; therefore, now, at the time of Covid-19 versatile opinions about the disease circulate on social media posts. Some of these viral opinions may refer to the ontological sphere of life and are therefore categorized as Bouchard's philosophical myths (2017, p. 28). Pakistani society is also experiencing various rational explanations related to human conditions at Covid-19, but these do not include supernatural reference as religious posts do. This paper finds 1242 linguistic clues related to philosophical explanation based on the various knowledge conditions of the Pakistani society's homeopathic and herbal fields. The words refer to various food, natural herbs, classical herbs, was, and home remedies like "arnica, kalonji and honey mixture, Sena maki qahwa, vitamin C supplements, plain water or kalonji water, olive qahwa with Ginger, clove (Laung) and cinnamon, clove to be chewed, vitamin D: Sun, egg white, vitamin A, apricot and its almonds, mangos, turmeric (Haldi) with hot milk, malathi" (PP11, PP12, PP13, PP14, PP15, PP16). Common people mostly post all these posts, but some nutritionists like Dr. Azmat Majeed (Lahore), Hakeem Umar Attari, also gave their only suggestions regarding food habits and home remedies. Thereby, this paper treats these as philosophical myths in the light of Bouchard's typology of myths.

Allegorical Myths

A natural and well-known reaction of various social media discourses on Covid-19 has been viewed as emotional trauma that appeared in different narratives, but these narratives are not new to this present crisis. The pandemic crisis has influenced public perceptions, inducing fear and fear-related coinciding behavioral effects as occurred with previous pandemics such as AIDS (Gonslaves & Staley, 2014), SARS (Hickson et al., 2004), and Ebola (Kinsman, 2012). The fear of Covid-19 is instigating Pakistani people to shape and respond towards various narratives based on hopes and fantasies on various social media platforms. When studied with the help of

data collected from Twitter and Facebook, these narratives revealed 387 words related to the fear and tragedy associated with Covid-19. The dominant feature of these posts shows that these come from those social actors who haven't themselves experienced the disease and are in awe of this disease. These actors and their posts are an amalgam of mystery and fantasy, tragedy and fear, thereby forming "Allegorical Myths" (Bouchard, 2017: 28). The words like "panic, social stigma, fear, ashamed, loneliness, wish not to be positive for corona" from the posts of the people who are afraid of coronavirus are organized as allegorical myths in this thematic paper category of myths (AP8, AP9, AP10).

Contextualization of the Myths

Social myths of any society after their origin within the society echo its challenges, conflicts, and contradictions, but at the same time, these myths may also include universal features of knowledge. The Tweets and Facebook posts previously categorized thematically are analyzed for any intertextual connections in the form of co-occurrence patterns that specify an instance-meaning that multiply the specificity of the meaning in a specific context i.e., local or global. This article scrutinizes each thematic post's linguistic content and finds that almost every category possesses its local Pakistani context, but some also include global features and the local context.

Intertextuality and Mixed Contexts

Intertextuality seems such a useful concept in locating the context of the text since it gestures terms of relativeness, interrelatedness, and interdependence in modern cultural life. The data is analyzed for its local and global contextual features based on three interconnecting categories of intertextuality: repetition, imitation, and allusion.

Repetition

The evaluation of the repetitive content present in social myths reveals that "dua, sadqa, prayers, recitation of Surah Rahman" are the most frequently used words in almost all social media posts related to Covid-19. It is pertinent to point out here that although every religious post emphasized these words regardless of the thematic category (religious, scientific, philosophical, and allegorical) of the posts, "sadqa and dua" appeared in 80% posts, thereby interconnecting the different categories with one another. While investigating these allegorical and philosophical posts based on the intertextuality of repetition of the same linguistic content, this article finds that the same herbs like "sanamaki, neem, kalwanji" and food items like "honey, juices, fruit, milk" are repeated in these posts interconnecting these posts with the others of such thematic content. The repetition strategy is also helpful in revealing the context for such highly emphasized linguistic cues as this context is most evident in the posts where there was an emphasis on listening to the recitation of "Surah Rahman" only by "Qari Abdul Basit." The repetitive emphasis on the particular personality shows the visible context of Pakistan in these religious posts.

On the other hand, the scientific posts' intertextual features show that these types of posts show mixed information, including both global and local contexts taken from doctors, scientists, and the popular social actors across the world and Pakistan. Here, it is also important to note that

the scientific posts did not restrict only one type of cure, but different actors advised, and some doctors even prescribed different medicines based on their personal experiences. Some doctors even used the words like "sadqa, dua, Allah se dua" repeatedly in their posts, which interconnect these posts with scientific posts again through the intertextual feature of repetition. This shows that Pakistani contextualized scientific posts also contain global scientific cures.

Imitation

The intertextual marker of imitation bears the similar features to repetition, and repetition brings forward the imitation of a text within another text (Lemke, 1995a; 1998). Henceforth, it is right to say that Pakistani social media posts are creating the imitating texts for "yet unknown and unproven cure" of Covid-19 through repeating the same textual contents from influential scientific, religious, and educated social actors. The inclusion of the medicine like "Hydroxychloroquin" or the herbs like "sanamaki, neem, kalwanji" or the spiritual words like "sadqa, dua, Allah se dua" shows that Pakistani society is fond of copying information rather than experiencing it by itself.

Allusion

Allusion in the form of a reference or example to another text is another kind of intertextuality found relevant to this paper. The use of "Hydroxychloroquin" was first advised by POTUS Donald Trump on March 19, 2020, in Washington Press Briefing. From there, this medicine was referred to by various social actors and doctors in Pakistan as well. The allusion of the same word "Hydroxychloroquin" shows its intertextual connection to the other scientific posts created in Pakistan in almost every scientific post. It also points out the global context of cure related to Covid-19 within Pakistani Tweets and Facebook posts. The ministerial posts also showed allusion examples as the emphasis on listening "Surah Rahman" is an allusion from some unknown source that reports SuraRahman having miraculous effects on sick and ailing people. Similarly, the emphasis on "sadqa" is an allusion from "Al-Mushaf" that it keeps away every curse.

The other two thematic categories, namely "Philosophical and Allegorical Myths" are proper examples of allusion as these arose in the society having previous myths including food fallacies, traditional practices for disease cure, quack referral, and misinterpretation of religion is quite famous (Goldberg, 2003; Dargaville, 1977; & Coppock, 1970). Pakistan being a third-world country, has already seen the various philosophical and allegorical tales related to Polio vaccine and contraceptive usages in the past (Stephenson & Hennink, 2004). The novel coronavirus adds some more narratives to the already present food and health myths by giving examples and reference to the cures of previous disease or epidemics. The present study investigates that despite knowing the scientific nature of the Covid-19 disease, the people turn their maximum attention towards these locally created cures and references, as is evident from 1650 linguistic cues related to these two types only. This study also comes to a point where based on the highest likes and retweets of locally oriented posts and tweets. These posts can be regarded local health myths or, more precisely, "desi myths" that are not proven for their

effectiveness yet the most commonly believed ones as these are the myths which are "strictly contextualized" having "no universal features' instead the strong ties to local social dynamics.

Configuration of CovidArchemyth of Pakistan

This study is unique because it discovers the configuration of *CovidArchemyth* in Pakistani social media platforms, which derives various religious, scientific, philosophical, and allegorical myths related to Covid-19. All derivative myths are sometimes observed simultaneously to prevent the dangers of the disease as people use good nutrition, take antimalarial pills, wash hands, and pray most often to survive the pandemic.

The post of Dr. Matiullah khan, a Professor of Medicine at Rawalpindi Medical University, after testing positive on the COVID test, can be taken as a prototype of an Archemyth, which is a combination of science, religion, sociology, biology, allegory, and nutrition. He articulates the scientific aspects through the words like "thermometer, pulse oximeter, Panadol, Hydoxycholoroquin 200mg, Tab Azithromycin 500mg OD, LDH, Ferritin and CRP Procalcitonin, D dimers"; religious aspects through linguistic content like "duas, sadka and astaghfar"; Philosophical and allegorical features through textual clues of "proning for 1 hour, Sana makki ka kehwa, Olive oil drops, Kolwanji, Neem k pattayka powder, Khajoor, Incat syrup, CaC 1000/osnate D or any calcium1, B complex (surbex or neurobion, Vit D, milk shakes, standard roti, chawal with salan". This single post contains the aggregation and coalition of all the social myths thereby forming Archemyth of Covid-19 as in the words of Bouchard, archemyth is based on an alliance of many myths, some of which may themselves be aggregates (2017). This post is not the only post in Pakistani social media discourse. The collected data in this paper shows that 62.5% of Twitter and Facebook posts show a similar coalition of features of various scientific, philosophical, allegorical, and religious myths (SP4, AP5, AP9, AP11, PP12, PP13, PP14, PP15, PP16).

The interesting point to note is that most of the posts containing religious and allegorical clues like "sadqa, dua, herbs, desi ghee, calmness, relaxation, proning" are the scientific posts as these came from the Twitter or Facebook accounts of doctors. This also suggests that the people of scientific background contextualize this disease in the Pakistani context by adding the words of "sadqa, duasetc". These scientific posts also add food like "fruit, roti, rice, salan" and "desi" (local) examples in their posts and tweets. This shows that a symbolic foundation in *CovidArchemyth* comprises a mixture of a set of beliefs, ideas, norms, narratives, and worldviews feeding on different categories of social myths in Pakistani society. The configuration of *Covid-19 Archemyth* brings forth the precise handling of coronavirus by Pakistani society and also highlights the coalition of religious, social, and medical actors by operating at the national level.

Conclusion

Pakistani society is based on the ideas and thoughts of the people whose life depends upon a shared social structure within Pakistani society. These shared concepts come from belief and creativity, fact and fiction, local and global views constructing a unique mythology in Pakistan that has found its strong foothold in the Covid-19 crisis. The present paper investigated the Covid-19 social myths of Pakistani society, openly promoted and used through social media

platforms in Pakistan. The study propounds that the social media discourse of dominant social actors hailing from religious, social, and philosophical arenas reflects strictly contextualized ideas in the wake of Covid-19. The patrons of science, especially doctors, clearly observe manifold beliefs and cures that are not yet scientifically proven to cure the novel coronavirus. The coalition of the social actors through the aggregate of all social myths set the scene for *CovidArchemyth* in Pakistan, which is an ample proof for developing Pakistani society in the world theatre where traditional beliefs tend to be intertwined with the peculiarities of the cultural environment. People promote cultural health-seeking behavior by putting aside the scientifically proven methods that often become life-threatening. Even during the present pandemic, the trend of seeking guidance and care from religion and "desi totkas" form a unique configuration of desi myths (local health myths) in Pakistan. Such a peculiar response towards this novel disease has been a collective representation of Pakistani society in the time of Covid-19 distress. This research also recommends analyzing visuals and images prevalent on social media platforms, which will further add to the description of the configuration of *CovidArchemyth* in Pakistan.

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